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## *Zubiri and the Very Problem of the Problem of Evil*

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*God not only allows evil; He also helps  
man to take leave of it.*<sup>1</sup>

### **Introduction**

Zubiri's account of evil—as well as his criticisms of the problem of evil as played out in traditional philosophy of religion—offers us a strong counter-argument against atheistic usage of the existence of evil.<sup>2</sup> Zubiri overcomes both defense and theodicy, raising the problem of evil, like most of his contemporaries in twentieth-century Spanish philosophy, to the level of what I have called “the very problem.” Just as the “problem of God” often ignores “the very problem of the problem of God,” I want to show that the “problem of evil” is a deficient mode of “the very problem of the problem of evil.”

In Spanish, there are two ways of interpreting the phrase “the very problem ....”<sup>3</sup> One way is to see it as *el problema mismo* ..., that something is a

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1 Xavier ZUBIRI, “El problema del mal,” *Sobre el sentimiento y la volición*, Diego GRACIA (ed.) (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1993), p. 314. All translations are mine.

2 This essay continues the line of thought started in a previous article of mine, “The Very Problem of the Problem of God in Zubiri and Unamuno,” in *The Xavier Zubiri Review* 6 (2004), pp. 73-88. There I argued that true atheism is impossible if Xavier Zubiri and Miguel de Unamuno are correct about the reason human beings talk about “God” at all.

3 These two ways are based on my colleagues' translation of my term into Spanish, oddly showing me two ways to think of it in English.

problem *at all*. Why is the problem of evil a problem for religion *at all*? Why is the problem of evil used inside of talk about God *at all*? Whatever the very problem of the problem of evil is, it will not be resolved by the solutions that are offered to the problem of evil; these solutions do little to answer the very problem of the problem of evil. Similarly, atheists attempt to use the problem of evil to prove that God does not exist, but I assert that the very problem of the problem of evil ends with theistic implications.

The second way to interpret “the very problem ...” is *el problema verdadero* ..., what the *true* problem is (in the British English sense of “very”). What is *really* at issue when we discuss the problem of evil? Does the problem of evil *really* have anything to do with God, or is it a *pseudoproblem*? I argue that the problem of evil is a pseudoproblem if it is truly a problem about God; however, it is a fundamental problem if it is about something else, namely, what it means for human beings to be constituted in such a way so as to be able to interpret things and events as “evil.” Why humans are so constituted would be the very problem of the problem of evil in the sense that what is really problematic in the problem of evil is human existence, viz. the way *Da-sein* finds itself as being-in-the-world. In this sense, every very problem might boil down to one: the very problem of the problem of being human, which is the only very problem that is one and the same as its problem.<sup>4</sup>

## I

For the sake of those who are not well versed in the philosophy of religion in general or in the discussions about the problem of evil in particular, this section offers a brief overview of the terms and arguments against which I am presenting Zubiri’s account.<sup>5</sup> I begin with a description of what evil is, followed by atheistic arguments against God’s existence. I then discuss two main attempts to circumvent the atheistic arguments.

There is a distinction made in the literature between two kinds of evil: moral evil and natural evil. Moral evils include morally wrong actions per-

4 This I argue in a manuscript in progress, *The Very Problems of Spanish Philosophy*.

5 The overview I provide here is rather standard in all of the general philosophy of religion literature. I have used the following texts over the years: Kelly James CLARK, *Return to Reason: A Critique of Enlightenment Evidentialism and a Defense of Reason and Belief in God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990); Nicholas EVERITT, *The Non-Existence of God* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004); Michael PETERSON *et al.*, *Reason & Religious Belief: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York, NY: Oxford, 1998); and Linda Trinkaus ZAGZEBSKI, *Philosophy of Religion: A Historical Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007). Those who are well acquainted with the issue can skip this section and proceed to my exegesis of Zubiri.

formed by moral agents as well as vicious character traits that moral agents cultivate. To the extent that these evils are the result of moral agency, they are *preventable* insofar as one could, after all, cultivate virtues and perform one's moral duties. Explaining moral evils usually depends on an account of moral psychology which will explicate why moral agents perform morally wrong actions and cultivate vicious character traits.

Natural evils, in contrast, are not the result of moral agency. These include "acts of God"<sup>6</sup> like earthquakes, tornadoes, floods, tsunamis, disease, pain, suffering, and perhaps even death itself. It is at the level of natural evil that the problem of evil really hits home. Moral agents cannot prevent such evils, so one must ask whether natural evils *can* be prevented by a greater agency, namely God. It is also questioned whether such agency *wants* to prevent natural evils.

This leads us to what is called the logical problem of evil (LPE). LPE is stated as the inconsistency of the following theses:

- (a) God is omnipotent and morally perfect.
- (b) Evil exists.

This alleged inconsistency is then imported into an atheistic argument:

- (1) Assume for contradiction that God exists.
- (2) Since God exists, God is omnipotent and morally perfect.
- (3) Since God is omnipotent, God can eliminate evil if God wants to.
- (4) Since God is morally perfect, God does not want evil.
- (5) But evil exists.
- (6) Since evil exists, either God cannot eliminate evil or God wants evil.
- (7) If God cannot eliminate evil, there is a contradiction since God is omnipotent.
- (8) If God wants evil, there is a contradiction since God is morally perfect.

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6 I hold Kant's view in which God is excluded from moral agency insofar as God is perfectly good. Since, as Kant argues, every *ought* for God *is*, there is no "moral space" in which God decides which maxims are universalizable. Therefore, the very phrase "acts of God" lacks moral implication. See Immanuel KANT, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Akk. 4:414.

(9) In both cases, there is a contradiction.

(10) Therefore, God does not exist.

The most common theistic response to LPE is to provide a *defense*. A defense attempts to show that a theist can consistently hold (a) and (b). Most defenses attack (4), claiming that it is possible for a morally perfect agent to allow evil. Defenses are usually of the form "God allows X to happen because there is some good Y that God wishes to bring about." The most common form of defense is the *free will defense*, made famous by Alvin Plantinga, which holds that God wants us to be moral agents (an alleged good) and therefore permits the risk that we will perform wrong actions (instead of right ones) and cultivate vices (instead of virtues). This accounts for moral evils. Natural evils are harder to defend, however, and the literature moves past LPE to another formulation of the problem of evil.

The evidentialist problem of evil (EPE) poses a stronger claim. EPE states that God's existence is highly improbable given all of the evil in the world. EPE is stronger than LPE because the theist cannot simply play a logic game that allows one to disagree with a premise of a *reductio ad absurdum* proof. Instead, it focuses on alleged particular evils, evils that directly challenge the theist's claims about God's power and goodness. William Rowe uses the famous example of a fawn being burned to death in a forest fire that was not the result of human agency; this seems too terrible a thing if the God with traditionally attributed characteristics did exist.

The power of EPE is that it does not accept the standard claim that there has to be evil in the world in order to understand goodness. EPE objects that although such a claim might have some merit, the question would still remain as to why fawns and other fauna have to die so painfully in order for us to understand goodness. Additionally, it seems that, for all of the evil in today's world, no one has a better understanding of what goodness is or how to be good to each other. Instead, we learn more and more ways to generate evil. In short, if one is going to claim that evil is somehow good because it allows goodness to be revealed, there had better be a reason why there is so much gratuitous evil that does not seem to produce good results.

The theistic response to EPE requires something stronger than a defense. A *theodicy* is an account that explains why an omnipotent and morally perfect God allows evil to exist. The most famous theodicy is Leibniz's claim that we live in the best of all possible worlds, that there is no other world that God could have made that would have as much goodness in it as our current one. Therefore, God has created a world without gratuitous evil; there is "just enough" evil in the world. Other theodicies claim that there is no such thing

as evil *per se*. Augustine's theodicy holds that what we consider to be evil is in reality a privation of goodness. This does not eliminate evil, but it does not lose sight of the goodness that makes evil possible. We see similar claims, although they are not congruent, in several of the Neoplatonists.<sup>7</sup>

So far I have presented theodicy and defense as two theistic responses to LPE and EPE. I find defenses problematic for the same reason EPE claims. Defenses do very little in the area of natural evil, and they definitely cannot account for what seems to be the excessive amount of evil in the world. More importantly, defenses fail, because they at best show that theism is not logically impossible, but they do not convince atheists that their understanding of evil and God is misguided.<sup>8</sup> We need something beyond defense. Granted, theodicies are better than defenses, but they unfortunately presuppose that the problem of evil has something to do with God. Theodicies and defenses grant atheists too much of their own position by agreeing that the problem of evil is indeed a problem that must be addressed inside of the problem of God. I propose that we move beyond theodicy and defense, and instead explore the very problem: Why do we put evil and God's existence together in the first place? This is not a question of *theodicy*, but rather, to coin a new word, of *anthropodicy*.<sup>9</sup>

## II

Zubiri's *El problema del mal* was given as a private lecture course in 1964 and published posthumously in 1993. It has not been given much attention—Lazcano's bibliography lists only four entries on it: three articles and a dissertation.<sup>10</sup> Zubiri's manuscript is divided into three chapters: "La realidad del mal," "El problema del mal," and "El mal y su causa última." Zubiri states in the opening of his text that he is not interested in the ethical questions concerning good and evil; rather, he will raise the metaphysical

7 Although the nuances between Neoplatonists on evil as privation vary, it is nonetheless safe to say that, when grafted into the contemporary debate, their arguments would collectively fall under the umbrella of theodicy. For more on the problem of evil in Neoplatonic thought, see Eric D. PERL, *Theophany: The Neoplatonic Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 2007), Chap. 4.

8 See Joel Thomas TIerno, "On Defense as Opposed to Theodicy," in *International Journal of the Philosophy of Religion* 59 (2006), pp. 167-174.

9 The very problem of the problem of evil is a question of philosophical anthropology. See Section V below.

10 Rafael LAZCANO, *Repertorio bibliográfico de Xavier Zubiri* (Washington, DC: Xavier Zubiri Foundation of North America, 2006), p. 133. One of the entries, "La metafísica del mal en Zubiri" by Andrés TORRES QUEIRUGA, is now part of Torres's newest book, *Filosofía de la religión en Xavier Zubiri* (Valencia: Tirant Lo Blanch, 2005), pp. 135-152.

questions, namely "What does it mean when one says that something is good or bad?"<sup>11</sup> The first chapter begins with that question. The second chapter outlines what the reality of evil is. The final chapter argues that God and evil are not connected in the way that traditional philosophy of religion has thought. I will devote a section to each of these chapters.

In Chapter One, Zubiri begins with a simple question: How do we know whether something is good or evil? The first guess would be to respond that *X* is good if we prefer *X*, and evil if we do not prefer *X*.<sup>12</sup> Zubiri dismisses this response as lacking fundamental explanatory power. Is *X* good because it is preferred, or is *X* preferred because it is good?<sup>13</sup> Zubiri asserts that *X* is preferred because it is good. So why is *X* good?

For Zubiri, *X* is good because it has been *esteemed* as good.<sup>14</sup> Zubiri warns us that esteeming is not a mere arbitrary or subjective (relativistic) expression; it is an act of intelligence. Since it is an act of intelligence, esteeming seeks the truth about what is esteemed: if *X* is esteemed as good, intelligence demands that there be a reason *X* has been so esteemed. There must be an *objective* answer to this demand. Zubiri turns to Max Scheler's account of value, probably due to Scheler's insistence that values are objective and fundamentally basic.<sup>15</sup>

Zubiri spends most of the chapter attacking Scheler's account of good and evil as values. Agreeing with Scheler that the esteeming of *X* and the *X* being esteemed are two different things and the result of two different phenomenological attitudes, Zubiri disagrees that the value of *X* is independent of the reality of *X*. For Scheler, values are independent from the things that "have" value. For example, being delicious is a value that is independent from the food or drink that is being esteemed as delicious. Zubiri disagrees, arguing that the naked reality<sup>16</sup> of *X* has something to do with the value one esteems in *X*. Although it is true that naked reality is independent from

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11 See ZUBIRI, *Sobre el sentimiento*, p.198.

12 Throughout the essay I will use *X* to represent any object, concept, or state of affairs that can be judged as "good" or "evil."

13 I am borrowing the wording of the Euthyphro dilemma (Is an action pious because the gods are pleased by it, or are the gods pleased by an action because it is pious?).

14 I will use the word "esteem" to translate the Spanish word *estimar*. Since English uses the word "estimation" in many ways, I will use the word "esteeming" to translate the Spanish word *estimación*, the act of judging goodness or badness.

15 See Max SCHELER, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values: A New Attempt Toward the Foundation of an Ethical Personalism*, trans. Manfred S. FRINGS and Roger L. FUNK (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973).

16 *La realidad nuda*, the immediately given world of experience.

value—"For the physicist, light is neither pleasing nor annoying"<sup>17</sup>—the converse is not true. Every act of esteeming always already involves an apprehension of reality.

This is not to suggest that values are reducible to the apprehension of reality. Zubiri states that reality is a necessary condition, but not a sufficient one, for value. It is true, to stay with the light example, that light can be pleasing only because of light's chromatic properties, but it is not true that my esteeming of light is simply an esteeming of those properties. The esteeming of *X* never directly hinges on any of *X*'s properties; if that were the case, then Scheler would be correct, and values would be "in" *X* that would cause one to esteem *X* as good or evil. Against this view, Zubiri states that "a thing does not 'have' value; rather, it 'is' valued ... [the value of *X*] is never a noun, but an adjective."<sup>18</sup> What is being esteemed in *X* is not a value; rather, values emerge as a result of *X*'s having been esteemed. There would be no such things as "values" if there were no acts of esteeming. Values "by themselves," Zubiri claims, do not exist; only valued realities do.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, the problem of evil (and the question of goodness) will be one about valued realities, not values *simpliciter*.

What are these valued realities? They are distinct from naked realities (e.g., light waves vs. the pleasant warmth of light), thus preserving the irreducibility of esteeming and the apprehension of reality. However, esteeming and the apprehension of reality are both intelligent, and are therefore exclusively human.<sup>20</sup> They are irreducible yet brought together in the intelligent grasp of human beings. Whatever is esteemed by human beings must also be apprehended as real by human beings. How do human beings esteem *X* above and beyond merely apprehending *X*'s naked reality? Zubiri states that what is esteemed when *X* is esteemed is *X*'s *condition*. The condition of *X* is not the same as *X*'s naked reality, nor does it add anything to *X* (remember that what is esteemed cannot be a "property" of *X*). It is simply the condition "in" which *X* "is found."<sup>21</sup> Returning to Scheler, Zubiri fixes the definition

17 ZUBIRI, *Sobre el sentimiento*, p. 211.

18 ZUBIRI, *Sobre el sentimiento*, p. 214.

19 ZUBIRI, *Sobre el sentimiento*, p. 215.

20 Zubiri spends a substantial amount of time in these lectures reasserting again and again that animals do not esteem, nor do they apprehend reality. This is important since these lectures predate *Inteligencia sentiente* by almost twenty years, showing that Zubiri's noology is already in place during the period of his work most defined by *Sobre la esencia*.

21 Zubiri, clearly influenced by Heidegger, is using the word *quedar*, which I am translating in such a way as to bring its meaning close to the German word *lassen*. Zubiri even uses the expression *hacer-quedar*, which would translate into "letting be": *Gelassenheit*. See ZUBIRI, *Sobre el sentimiento*, pp. 218-219.



of value in light of his discussion of condition, claiming that “what we call ‘value’ is founded in the condition in which reality ‘is found’ by my act of esteeming.”<sup>22</sup> Values result from esteeming, not the other way around.

The esteeming of *X*’s condition, then, is neither about value nor about naked reality. Values are the by-products of esteeming, and naked reality is the condition for the possibility of esteeming. Naked reality, Zubiri states *à la* Nietzsche, is “beyond good and evil.”<sup>23</sup> This does not mean that good and evil are not real, however. Good and evil are real, but they are not part of naked reality. There is reality beyond naked reality. Beyond the world of immediate experience is a world that is *mediated*. The condition of *X* is not immediately given; it is the result of mediation. Inspired by Heidegger, Zubiri turns to the *mediator* who has mediated experience: “every good and every evil is good or evil *for someone*. This ‘for’ does not mean that good and evil are relative ... we are not talking about *relativity* but *respectivity* ... without this respectivity there would be no possibility of something being in good or bad condition.”<sup>24</sup> Zubiri immediately dismisses the idea that mediation makes esteeming subjective and relative to each person. Instead, Zubiri is thinking about his notion of respectivity, a notion derived from Heideggerian phenomenology.<sup>25</sup>

In a nutshell, respectivity is the fact that nothing in the world exists by itself. Realities, naked or valued, are not independent of everything else that is real. There is only one reality “in” which all things “are” or “are found.” Zubiri calls this *totality*, from Heidegger, “world.” At times he uses the expression “*la*” *realidad*, reality itself. Everything real is real in virtue of the totality of reality. Zubiri warns us not to think of the totality of reality as an aggregate of real things, nor as an additional property of real things. Reality is “where” *Da-sein*<sup>26</sup> finds itself and “wherein” “innerworldly” realities can “be found.”<sup>27</sup>

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22 ZUBIRI, *Sobre el sentimiento*, p. 219.

23 ZUBIRI, *Sobre el sentimiento*, p. 224. Of course, Zubiri differs from Nietzsche insofar as Nietzsche thinks of good and evil as values, and subjective ones at that.

24 ZUBIRI, *Sobre el sentimiento*, p. 225.

25 See Martin HEIDEGGER, *Sein und Zeit*, Sections 17-18. The comparison to Heidegger goes only so far. For example, Heidegger immediately experiences what Zubiri would say is mediated. So the parallel has its caveats.

26 ZUBIRI, *Sobre el sentimiento*, p. 225. Zubiri does not use the word “*Da-sein*” here, but I prefer translating the general Spanish term *el hombre* as *Da-sein* instead of the old gender-exclusive term “man” (as in “mankind”). *Da-sein* is the kind of entities that human beings are; it is the way human beings “be.” See HEIDEGGER, *Sein und Zeit*, Section 2.

27 Recall that for Zubiri, reality is not a “zone of things,” but a *formality*.

Condition is a kind of respectivity, not of naked reality, but of valued reality. It is mediated respectivity. To explain his notion of mediation, Zubiri makes a distinction between "real things" (*cosas-realidad*) and "meaning things" (*cosas-sentido*). Wood, for example, is a *real-thing*. Toothpicks, while still being wood (and therefore real things), are only such "in a mediated context" (Heidegger calls this "reference"); they are *meaning-things*. In order for *X* to be a meaning-thing, *X* also has to be a real-thing; but, of course, the converse is not true. A lump of gold does not have to have a mediated meaning; it is what it is. What tables are, however, are not "tables." Tables *are* wood, metal, etc. Contrary to Heidegger, Zubiri argues that no one immediately apprehends a meaning-thing; there has to have been a previous apprehension of naked reality, of real-things.<sup>28</sup>

Nonetheless, in agreement with Heidegger, Zubiri holds that *Da-sein* is necessary in order for things to have meaning (or even to have no meaning). Zubiri states it perfectly: "Without *Da-sein* there would not be doors." Good and evil are therefore only good and evil *for Da-sein*. This does *not*—it must be reiterated again—imply that good and evil are somehow "less real" because *Da-sein* must be present in order for their reality to be. Why *Da-sein*? Zubiri gives a Heideggerian answer: because *Da-sein* cares about reality. *Da-sein* is not only respective to other realities in the world, but is also respective to its very own substantivity.<sup>29</sup> *Da-sein* can esteem its own condition. Zubiri denies animals this capacity: "In the world that is given to us, goods and evils are constitutively respective to *Da-sein*, for there is condition only in respect to *Da-sein*. For animals there is nothing good or evil; they can have bothersome or damaging stimuli, but not good or evil stimuli."<sup>30</sup>

*Da-sein* esteems *X* as good or evil because *Da-sein* is respective to things in the world in which *Da-sein* finds itself (and things are respective to *Da-sein*).<sup>31</sup> *Da-sein* gives meaning to the objects, concepts, and states of affairs that it encounters. This is the origin of all evaluation. Already one can see that the problem of God traditionally formulated has ignored the role of *Da-sein*; perhaps this is why the philosophy of religion, like Heidegger's claims about theology, mathematics, and the sciences in *Being and Time*, is in need of a *fundamental ontology*.

28 ZUBIRI, *Sobre el sentimiento*, p. 230.

29 Zubiri uses the word *substantividad* [substantivity] instead of *substancia* [substance] in order to break away from the metaphysical baggage that comes with the notion of "substance." See Xavier ZUBIRI, *Sobre la esencia*.

30 ZUBIRI, *Sobre el sentimiento*, p. 234.

31 This fact will matter in Section IV.

### III

With the metaphysical groundwork done, Zubiri turns his attention in Chapter Two to how people throughout the tradition have formulated the ways in which things can be in “bad condition.” Of course, Zubiri will reject any account that considers evil at the level of naked reality. He gives us three examples of such an attempt: Manichaeism, Zoroastrianism, and Platonic/Neoplatonic philosophy. Manichaeism and Zoroastrianism both present a dualism of opposing natural forces: Good and Evil understood in a substantive sense. In Manichaeism, these forces are on equal footing; in Zoroastrianism, Evil is inferior to Good. There are other differences between the two, but the point remains that both traditions understand Good and Evil as existing in the world independent of human esteeming.

Similarly, Greek thought treats evil as something in naked reality. Zubiri focuses his criticism of Greek thought on Plotinus. For Plotinus, evil is matter, the privation of form.<sup>32</sup> Greek thought is superior to Manichaeism and Zoroastrianism insofar as the Greeks did not believe in absolute evil; everything that is intelligible has some degree of goodness. Where Zubiri disagrees with Greek thought is in its equivalences of evil and nothingness, evil and lack of beauty or deformity, and evil and imperfection.

Matter, insofar as it is unintelligible, is *not*. For Plotinus, Zubiri claims, matter is evil because it falls outside of the One’s realm; it is un-formed. From this point of view, hylomorphism results in evil: “Only because concrete things, material things, are a mixture of form and matter, of being and nothingness, are they evil. Material things are not evil *per se*, but they are evil insofar as they have as part of them a material principle.”<sup>33</sup> Every thing (object) is good insofar as it is intelligible as a thing. Here, goodness is Being, and evil is the lack of Being. This same argument holds, with appropriate modification, for goodness as beauty (evil as ugliness/deformity) and goodness as perfection (evil as imperfection).

Zubiri responds by granting that all evil is a deformity, but not all deformity is evil. Similarly, evil is indeed a kind of imperfection, but not all imperfection is evil. Both of these definitions of evil presuppose that form is perfect, and that the perfection of form is good. No problems there. However, although the perfection of form is good, it would be a mistake to immedi-

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32 Plotinus also has an account of moral evil, which is not directly caused by matter but by a “descent from intellectual contemplation to sense perception as its mode of cognitive activity” (PERL, *Theophany*, p. 55). Zubiri focuses on Plotinus’s account of material evil only, mostly due to Zubiri’s focus on evil in naked reality, which does not yet involve moral evils.

33 ZUBIRI, *Sobre el sentimiento*, p. 244.

ately suppose that goodness is nothing more than “perfection of form.” If this is what goodness and evil are, “formity”<sup>34</sup> and deformity, “the problem of evil remains intact.”<sup>35</sup> What Zubiri means is that such an account of evil does not answer the question posed by the problem of evil, nor does it address the act of esteeming. I esteem *X* as good even though *X* has a material cause. Similarly, I esteem *X* as evil even though *X* has a formal cause. I do not esteem *X*’s formal cause as good and esteem *X*’s material cause as evil. That would revert us back to Scheler’s position of treating good and evil as values found “in” *X*. What is esteemed is not any “part” of *X*, but *X* as a unified whole. In the same vein, being is not to be automatically considered a good and nothingness an evil. If I esteem *X* as evil, it is not due to the nothingness “in” *X*, nor do I esteem *X* as good simply because of its being.

For Zubiri, the truth of the matter about matter is that “matter, as a moment of naked reality is not ‘nothing’; it *is* the material part of being. Matter is a positive moment of the constitution of naked reality. As such it is neither ‘nothing’ nor evil.”<sup>36</sup> The world is material; that is the way it is. To make matter evil results in making everything in naked reality evil, and Zubiri does not want to hold that view. There are things in the world—material things—that are to be esteemed as good. Expanding this idea to Leibniz’s claim that evil is limitation, Zubiri affirms:

Reality is what it is. The most one could say—and has to say—is that there would not be evil without limitation: that is true. But in no way can it be affirmed that limitation itself should be an evil. Are we going to say that it is an evil that dogs do not have intelligence? Dogs are what they are. Are we going to say that it is an evil that human beings are not angels? Human beings are what they are ... Limitation is the possibility of evil—nothing more.<sup>37</sup>

Naked reality is neither good nor evil. It is possible for naked reality to be deformed, limited, material, and “imperfect” (in the sense of not being a pure form), and it is indeed the case that things esteemed as evil are deformed, limited, material, and “imperfect,” but it is not necessarily the case that those “properties” *make* reality esteemed *as evil*. Instead, one must look at *X*’s condition and, more importantly, *Da-sein*’s respectivity to *X*’s condition.

When one esteems *X* as good or evil, one is esteeming *X*’s condition. Zubiri states that *X*’s condition does not have to automatically be esteemed as good or evil; most things in their “average everydayness” (to use Heidegger’s

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34 Zubiri coins this term to describe Plotinus’s idea of the goodness of form vs. the evilness of lacking form.

35 ZUBIRI, *Sobre el sentimiento*, p. 247.

36 ZUBIRI, *Sobre el sentimiento*, pp. 248-249.

37 ZUBIRI, *Sobre el sentimiento*, p. 250.

term) are neither good nor evil—they are indifferent. What makes a *meaning-thing* the object of esteeming? For Zubiri, *Da-sein* esteems *X* only when *X* is respective to *Da-sein*'s own substantivity. *Da-sein* is never indifferent; since *Da-sein* is respective to itself, it is always "self-esteemed." The esteeming of *X* is judged, Zubiri claims, in comparison to such self-esteeming, which he calls "the formal and integral plenitude of human substantivity."<sup>38</sup>

Leaving the question of what constitutes the formal and integral plenitude of human substantivity to ethics,<sup>39</sup> Zubiri finally gives a definite definition of good and evil. Good is the conformity of *X* (*X* not as naked reality but as a meaning-thing) with *Da-sein*'s self-esteeming. When one says "*X* is good," one is saying that one's self-esteeming is improved in respectivity to *X*. Evil is the nonconformity of *X* with *Da-sein*'s self-esteeming. When one says "*X* is bad," one is saying that one's self-esteeming is hindered in respectivity to *X*. Of course, *X* is esteemed as neither good nor as evil when *X* does not interact with *Da-sein*'s self-esteeming. In that sense, echoing Heidegger's opening claim about *Da-sein* from Div. I, Ch. 1 of *Being and Time*, good and evil "are *my* good and *my* evil."<sup>40</sup> Zubiri does not mean by this that good and evil are relative; rather, Zubiri is stating that every act of esteeming happens in respectivity to *Da-sein*'s own self-esteeming.

Returning to the question of privation, it is indeed true that evil is a privation, namely, a privation of something that would promote *Da-sein*'s self-esteeming. Zubiri is quick to warn us that there is a difference between "privation" and "lack." Privation is indeed a lack, but one can lack something without being deprived. He gives the example of a human and a mole. Both lack vision, but the mole is not deprived of vision. Moles are what they are, creatures that, primarily due to living underground, do not need vision. Humans need to be able to see in order to live full human lives. This is why blindness is considered an evil; the lack of vision is esteemed as a deprivation of an important functioning of the human body that results in a decrease in the blind person's formal and integral plenitude of substantivity. One can have a lower self-esteeming due to being blind but not due to a lack of wings. Agreeing with Augustine, Zubiri indicates that for something to be an evil, there has to be a "deficient" cause (instead of an efficient one).

38 Sec ZUBIRI, *Sobre el sentimiento*, p. 252.

39 Although I would venture that Zubiri is a Kantian in light of the terms "formal" and "integral." I thank Jeffrey Wilson for his unpublished work on Kant's account of *Da-sein* as *res integra* in the *Opus Postumum*.

40 ZUBIRI, *Sobre el sentimiento*, p. 254. Heidegger claims that *Da-sein* "is in each case mine" (HEIDEGGER, *Sein und Zeit*, Sec. 9).

Zubiri concludes Chapter Two by outlining four kinds of evil: maleficence (*maleficio*), malice (*malicia*), malignity (*malignidad*), and decline (*maldad*). Maleficence roughly corresponds to natural evil, while the other three are moral evils. Malice, malignity, and decline correspond to the three dimensions of human be-ing<sup>41</sup> according to Zubiri's philosophical anthropology: individual, social, and historical.<sup>42</sup> We will describe each in turn.

A maleficence is whatever promotes dis-integration of one's psychobiological organism. Anything that threatens my psychobiological life is a maleficence. When one esteems tsunamis as evil, one is saying that tsunamis threaten the formal and integral plenitude of human substantivity *qua* psychobiological organism. Goods are those things that promote one's psychobiological being. Maleficence can go undetected, but whenever it is noticed (for example, as symptoms of a disease) it is immediately esteemed as evil. Zubiri differentiates between maleficence and pain. Although pain is an evil (for human beings), not all evils are painful. In short, a maleficence is that which, consciously known or not, deprives one of what one needs for one's psychobiological survival. It is important to notice that a maleficence need not be evil *per se*; it is evil insofar as it threatens one's psychobiological constitution.

The other three types of evil are different from maleficence. Maleficence does not require moral agency. Illness "happens" to one's psychobiological organism, often without regard to one's moral status. The explosion of a landmine instantly dis-integrates an organism, be it the organism of an enemy, a friend, or an innocent civilian. Of course, the *placement* of landmines or the *doing* of things that lead to illness are the results of moral agency, of one's *volition*. It is from one's volition that malice derives.

Malice is the act of volition that seeks and desires that which is esteemed as evil. It does not matter whether the agent is confused about whether that which is desired is good or evil; if *X* is esteemed evil, and agent *Y* acts out of desire for *X*, *Y* has acted maliciously. Malice is the non-conformity with one's own self-esteeming: my volition desires that which, in respectivity to my self-esteeming, is esteemed as evil. In this regard, malice is not independent from maleficence; the difference between the two is that malice is the use of volition to create that which, at some level, will be maleficent. In this sense,

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41 For Zubiri, human be-ing is not the same as what one usually refers to as "being." Zubiri calls that "reality." "Be-ing" is the *way* a reality carries out its essence. Of course, Zubiri's conception of be-ing in this sense is influenced by Heidegger's account of be-ing as *Ereignis*, the ownmost "essencing" of something.

42 See Xavier ZUBIRI, *Tres dimensiones del ser humano: individual, social, histórica*, Jordi COROMINAS (ed.) (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 2006).

malice is itself a kind of maleficence insofar as it threatens one's psychobiological organism, regardless of whether or not the agent feels threatened.

Malignity differs from malice only in the sense that the resulting maleficence is not only individual but social. When one is malignant, one's malice causes others to do acts of malice; it "incites" and "inspires" evil in other people.<sup>43</sup> Zubiri points out that malice does not have to become malignant, but all malignity results from a primary evil: one's malice. To avoid malignity, one must avoid malice. The malign agent is morally wrong in a double sense: one is wrong for having a malicious volition and wrong for being malignant. The agent who is inspired by malignity is guilty of malice insofar as the malice was inspired by malignity; however, this malice could become malignant, making the agent also guilty of malignity.

Decline is a historical sense of moral evil. Zubiri uses Hegel's phrase "objective spirit" to describe the agency that finds itself in decline. The biggest evil of decline is the inability to recognize maleficence, malice, and malignity. The obvious example is the Nazi-inspired *Volkgeist* of Germans during the 1930s. The leaders were malignant insofar as they inspired malice in the citizens, who then sent Jews to concentration camps where much maleficence took place, often as a result of malice or malignity. Zubiri calls decline "the erection of evil as an objective power,"<sup>44</sup> that is, as a moral evil that "frees" individual agents from being judged as evildoers. The opposite of decline, social progress, is simply the movement of objective spirit in which people are optimally able to see themselves as moral agents.

In sum, without human self-esteeming, nothing would be esteemed as good or as evil. Naked reality is neither good nor evil, but *X*'s condition in respectivity to one's own self-esteeming is always either good or evil. Evils exist as realities, realities that affect the formal and integral plenitude of human substantivity. Part of human existence, *qua* self-esteeming, is the reality of good and evil. So what does God have to do with good and evil?

#### IV

The final chapter of the lecture course turns to the question of God's role in the existence of evil in the world. Zubiri begins by stating the traditional characteristics of God: that God is an intelligent personal creator whose essence implies existence. Of additional importance is Zubiri's claim that God is self-respective and self-esteeming. Zubiri poses three questions for

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43 ZUBIRI, *Sobre el sentimiento*, p. 278.

44 ZUBIRI, *Sobre el sentimiento*, p. 281.



Chapter Three: (1) Is God the cause of evil? (2) Is evil accepted by God? (3) Why does evil exist?

Zubiri begins with a discussion of whether God causes there to be evil in the world. God made the world, and insofar as it is created, it is the result of divine volition; that is, God made the world God wanted to make. Zubiri asserts that one must not think that God created naked reality only; God created a *world*, and, as mentioned earlier, “world” implies respectivity amongst realities. The universe is a meaning-thing that is respective to God as its creator. However, God is not respective to the creation. That is to say, the creation does not affect God; God’s constitution is never threatened by it, nor does God change anything about God’s self on behalf of creation. From this position, everything in creation is God’s *glory*. Since God is self-esteeming, and since creation is the result of divine volition, God esteems the creation as good. As Zubiri puts it, “reality [itself] ... in its pure character of intentionally wanted reality, has the condition of goodness ... created reality is intrinsically good purely and simply because what God physically and intentionally wanted is the physical naked reality of what God produced.”<sup>45</sup>

Zubiri returns to the argument of whether physical naked reality is evil, stating that if evil were a principle of physical naked reality, and if God created physical naked reality, then evil would have been created by God. However, if God created evil, evil would be good since God esteems creation as good. After all, this would be how the theistic Neoplatonists would explain evil: goodness is the cause of evil.<sup>46</sup> Zubiri denies this seemingly satisfactory answer, because evil is not at the level of naked reality. In fact, at the level of naked reality, nothing is evil. Zubiri writes that “there are no substantivities that *qua* substantivities are evil because all substantivities are formally the result of creation and as such are good.”<sup>47</sup> So, what about the esteeming of the condition of meaning-things?

Zubiri bluntly states that “in no way is God the cause of evil.”<sup>48</sup> God is not the creator of maleficence, because nothing is maleficent “by itself.” The things that threaten the formal and integral plenitude of human substantivity are not by themselves evil. *Da-sein* esteems maleficence as evil because it threatens human life; if it did not threaten human life, it would not be considered maleficent. For example, if tsunamis simply caused surfers to ride extra-“gnarly” waves, no one would esteem them as evil. Similarly, there

45 ZUBIRI, *Sobre el sentimiento*, pp. 292-293.

46 See PERL, *Theophany*, pp. 57, 60.

47 ZUBIRI, *Sobre el sentimiento*, p. 294.

48 ZUBIRI, *Sobre el sentimiento*, p. 294.



are millions of bacteria in the human body. Many of the “inhabitants” are beneficent, so we never worry about them, nor do we esteem them as evil. Similarly, if the HIV virus helped our psychobiological organism, it would not be esteemed as an evil. When God created the HIV virus, it was perfect, and perfectly does what it does. It takes white blood cells and uses them for replicators. Where is the evil in that? It lies in the autoimmune deficiency syndrome that results from such replication. The HIV virus is not doing something *wrong*; to the contrary, it is working perfectly. Zubiri states that God is at best an *indirect* cause of maleficence; what God directly causes is created reality, and the creation itself has always already been esteemed as good and as being in good working order.

Most scholars remove God from the equation when it comes to moral evils, claiming the free will defense. Zubiri does not offer the free will defense *per se*, but instead offers a metaphysical account of human moral agency that makes the free will defense possible. For whatever reason God had, God made the world with human moral agencies, people with free will and volition. Since moral agency is a created reality, it is esteemed as good. Therefore, at the level of created reality, malice “is something positive, a positive condition in which my volition finds itself whenever it effectively decides to choose something bad.”<sup>49</sup> It indeed sounds strange to say that malice is a good thing, especially since Zubiri states that acts of malice are to be esteemed as evil. What Zubiri means is that God chose to create a world in which moral agents have the ability to be evil; they are esteemed as good insofar as they do not threaten God’s constitution.

If God had made moral agents with free will, but they never committed any acts of malice, would they really be free-willed moral agents? Would there be any proof that free will *worked*? Malice shows God that free will works:

[W]hat God wanted and created is a personal substantivity that is in and for itself and is able to ... freely want its own condition ... The ability to be evil is inherent to liberty ... and was created by God, and it is one of the greatest and most splendid goods that exist in the universe: the ability to be evil.<sup>50</sup>

Moral evils are caused by human moral agents, not God. God is the cause of human beings, but not of the evil they cause. In that sense, God is neither the direct nor the indirect cause of moral evil. Moral evil, however, is rarely at the heart of the problem of evil since it is (for most part) preventable by human means.

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49 ZUBIRI, *Sobre el sentimiento*, p. 296.

50 ZUBIRI, *Sobre el sentimiento*, p. 297.

The problem lies in what is considered to be God's complicity with natural evil (maleficence). Zubiri addresses this problem head on: "Certainly God could impede the existence of evil. However, God did not want to; that is, God is not complacent, but he did not want to impede evil ... God does not accept evil, but God does permit it."<sup>51</sup> Indeed, God could have made a different world; that is not up for dispute. What world would that have been? A *different* one—a world that was not the world God wanted to create. God could have made a world in which the HIV virus did not replicate by means of invading white blood cells. Indeed that would be "better" for us, but what would happen to the HIV virus? It sounds strange to say that God "wanted" the HIV virus, but it was created and is therefore good. It is only evil respective to us.

Is the atheist actually asking why God does not play favourites with the creation? We favour ourselves, of course, because we are self-esteeming. God's self-esteeming favours God, not human beings. God does not want evil, but permits it insofar as there is no other way to get everything God wants to exist in one and the same world. To demand that God pay exclusive attention to our self-esteeming goods leads us to claim that God is complacent in the problem of evil. Zubiri agrees that God would be complacent if our own self-esteeming goods were of interest to God; the atheistic lament is that God does not pay enough attention to what human beings wish the world were like. As Zubiri argues elsewhere, this is the essence of the atheistic position: the desire that God do things our way instead of God's way.<sup>52</sup> For example, if salmonella bacteria were to have a self-esteeming capacity, and therefore have the capacity to esteem things as good or evil, antibacterial soap would be esteemed as evil, although human beings esteem it as good. Humans expect God to care most about their esteemings, not the possible esteeming of the whole of creation.

Zubiri concludes Chapter Three with an exploration into why there is evil at all. Moral evils are easy to explain; free human agents perform acts of malice, inspire malice in others, and collectively enter into moments of decline. Maleficence is harder to explain, however. Zubiri offers two explanations for the existence of evil, especially maleficence, both having to do with human beings (since human beings are the ones who experience evil as a reality): the biographical explanation and the historical explanation.

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51 ZUBIRI, *Sobre el sentimiento*, p. 299.

52 See STONE, Sec. IV

The biographical explanation has to do with the human quest to live one's life. Unlike other living creatures, humans must make their own life. This involves, as Ortega y Gasset argues,<sup>53</sup> facilities and difficulties—things that help our life run smoothly and other things we must overcome—which we run into while “navigating” our lives. Zubiri grants that God could have made a world in which there were no difficulties, but then one would not make a life. The theme of “making a life” is at the centre of all contemporary Spanish philosophy, and Zubiri is no exception.

We are to make our lives; this is the biographical explanation of evil. Zubiri writes that “[God] wanted to create us in the condition of *travelers*, not just for the other life—that is another question—but in this life in which ... we go forging the moral character of our personality.”<sup>54</sup> Evil is the substance of our lives, the obstacles which one faces and often overcomes. For example, narrative, a fundamental expression of human life, hinges on the protagonist who overcomes obstacles. No one wants a story in which everything goes as planned. Zubiri argues that making one's life is a good higher than any evil one encounters, and that is why one always sides with the protagonist. We have real faith that good will triumph over evil in the end. If this were not so, then God would indeed be complacent, since God would be allowing evil to exist *in vain*, and the atheist would be right that this would merit a disdain for such a God.

The historical explanation has to do with the collective human experience. Civilization is itself one big voyage with its own set of facilities and difficulties. As society advances, however, it must reach an apex and enter into decline. The decline is itself possible due to progress, for if there were no progress to begin with, there would be no decline. Evil is, in a certain sense, the substance of history. One of the dimensions of human being is history, and it is therefore good insofar as God created human beings.

Zubiri mentions how Christianity shows this fact in the clearest light. Christianity holds that God enters into human history through the Incarnation. Jesus teaches that evil is what it is and that the real question is “What are we

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53 José ORTEGAY GASSET wrote many books on the existential task of making one's life. I recommend *Some Lessons in Metaphysics*, trans. Mildred ADAMS (New York, NY: Norton, 1969); *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Mildred ADAMS (New York, NY: Norton, 1960); and *What is Knowledge?*, trans. Jorge GARCÍA-GÓMEZ (Albany, NY: SUNY, 2002).

54 ZUBIRI, *Sobre el sentimiento*, p. 305. We live as “livers,” those who live their lives as an adventure. Our lives, as Ortega y Gasset states, are like voyagers at sea, sometimes shipwrecked castaways.

going to do about it?"<sup>55</sup> Jesus did not see evil as something without which the world would somehow be *better*; instead, it is the overcoming of evil that makes the world better. Jesus does not teach his followers to ask God to make the world a better place or to ask God why God made the world God made. Instead, followers of Jesus are to *act* and *make* life. Only once does Jesus express the desire that God would have made a different world, but then Jesus simply gives the best answer: "Yet not as I will, but as you will."<sup>56</sup>

Zubiri concludes his lecture course with the following words, words that sum up his position about God and evil explained above:

God is not the cause of evil, nor does God accept it. Not only does God neither want nor accept evil, but He only allows it by means of an ordination toward better goods: a biographically moral personhood and a historically moral experience. Precisely from this derives the only attitude that *Da-sein* can and need take about the problem of evil ... do what God does with evil: permit it in view of greater goods.<sup>57</sup>

## V

Humans indeed find evil *problematic*. It is one more thing to deal with while dealing with another problem, the problem of making a life, or, as I have called it, the problem of being human. Humanity is a difficult task; it requires personal, social, and historical *poiesis*. We see the attempts of humans throughout all of civilization to make their lives and to make the lives they have made make sense. These are what the Greeks called *pragmata*. The task is not to simply be a living organism, but to be a person: a *homo personificans* more than a *homo sapiens*.<sup>58</sup> I like the term *homo personificans* because it contains the fact that we are not mere knowers (*sapiens*) but makers of our lives, our personae (*personificans*). As Zubiri pointed out, evil is required for such persona formation. The same is true for civilization itself as a human historical event.

The atheist can be defined as the person who detests the task of making a life and creating a civilization. Frustrated by the evil faced, the atheist blames God for having to make a self, and, ignorant of the fact that God is not threatened, *threatens* non-belief unless things start going the atheist's way. The atheistic option is not the only one, though. The theist sees evil for

55 The same question God poses to Cain in Genesis 3 after accepting Abel's offering but declining Cain's. It is tempting to think that Cain's offering was inferior, but Genesis does not suggest this.

56 Matthew 26:39.

57 ZUBIRI, *Sobre el sentimiento*, p. 319-320.

58 I thank Jasper Blystone for giving me many of the terms that help me think about the very problem of the problem of human being.

what it is: something out of which *personae* are made. The problem of having to make one's self, the very problem of the problem of being human, opens up to humans as the problem of God. The only possible connection between God and the existence of evil is *Da-sein*, even the atheist's *Da-sein*. God is not at odds with those things that we esteem as evil, although the atheist wishes that God were at odds with what we esteem as evil. This wish that God esteemed things the same way *Da-sein* does turns into what Unamuno calls an *odium antitheologicum*, an anti-God hatred.<sup>59</sup>

Instead of seeing the problem of evil as an indictment of complacency on God's part, the theist understands that just as the problem of God has to do with the difficulties involved in making one's life (the hope that we do not craft our lives in vain if we die utterly), the problem of evil has to do with the same set of difficulties. The theist recognizes that *the problem of evil has nothing to do with God at all*. Rather, *the problem of evil has to do with the kind of entity that Da-sein is*: the very problem of the problem of being human.

So, what is the very problem of the problem of evil? The *problema mismo* is that both God and evil are integral parts of the human drama, so it is easy to assume that, since *A* has to do with *B* and since *C* has to do with *B*, *A* has something to do with *C*. It is true that God and evil are connected by means of the human being who needs to make a life, but it is not so sure that God and evil are connected to each other "in a world without us." The solutions to the problem of evil act as if there are evils independent of human esteeming, but that is not the case. The problem of evil gains theistic implications when one acknowledges the absolutely *human* dimension of its formulation: Why did God give us such a difficult task? Couldn't God have made a world in which making a life would have been easier? The answer is that God made the world that pleases God, which includes a world in which human existence is defined as a biographical quest against evil. As the epigraph reads, "God not only allows evil; He also helps man to take leave of it."

The *problema verdadero* has to do with our disgust with evil. What atheistic thinkers are pointing out with the problem of evil is actually very important for theists, especially people who claim to be Christians: *there is way too much evil in the world*. Most of this excessive evil is moral evil or natural evil caused by moral evil. We can actually do something about that; *we* are the ones who will reduce moral evil because we are its cause. Natural evils that are not the result of moral evils must be esteemed as evil and be so

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59 Miguel de UNAMUNO, *Tragic Sense of Life*, trans. J. E. CRAWFORD FLITCH (New York, NY: Dover, 1954), p. 95.

esteemed in full understanding of what such esteeming means and what makes such esteeming possible. There is not an excess of evil on God's account: *God's plan is that Da-sein thrive in spite of evil.* The atheist will have to look somewhere else to avoid the very problem of the problem of God.